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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

THURSDAY, MAY 26, 2005

THIS REPORT PRESENTS THE TURKISH PRESS SUMMARY UNDER THREE THEMES:

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HEADLINES

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OPINION MAKERS

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BRIEFING

Speaker Arinc in US: Turkish Parliament Speaker Bülent Arinc, in the United States as the official guest of House Speaker Dennis Hastert, met representatives of the Jewish community and the Assembly of Turkish-American Associations (ATAA) on Wednesday, Turkish media report. Arinc is scheduled to meet Speaker Hastert on Thursday, before holding talks with Vice President Dick Cheney and National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley. Arinc will also meet members of the US-Turkey Friendship Caucus on Friday before moving on to Chicago for meetings with Turkish and American businessmen.

Upcoming Conferences on Turkey-US Ties: The US-Turkish Business Council will organize two conferences in June to mark the 20th anniversary of its founding, Council Chairman Dr. Yilmaz Arguden told the semi-official Anatolian News Agency (AA) on Wednesday. Arguden said that the first conference will be held at Istanbul's Bosphorus University (BU) on June 2, with the participation of US Ambassador Eric Edelman. The second conference will be held in Washington DC June 5-7. Economy Minister Ali Babacan, AK Party lawmaker Egemen Bagis, former members of the US House of Representatives Jack Buechner and Larry LaRocco, the American Jewish Committee's Barry Jacobs, German Marshall Fund Director Ronald Asmus, and Washington Post columnist David Ignatius are among the speakers who will come to Istanbul. Some 20 US Congressmen will travel to Turkey to attend the conference, according to AA. Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan, Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul, Defense Minister Vecdi Gonul, Energy Minister Hilmi Guler, Deputy Chief of General Staff General Ilker Basbug, and National Security Council (NSC) Secretary General Yigit Alpogan are to attend the conference in Washington, DC.

Rubin on the Shape of the US-Turkish Relationship: Michael Rubin, an American Enterprise Institute (AEI) expert on the Middle East, told "Zaman" that Prime Minister Erdogan's upcoming visit to Washington could be a 'starting point' for putting relations back on track. Rubin noted that although Erdogan's US visit could be helpful, it should not be expected to sort out all of the issues between Ankara and Washington. He noted that Ankara should change its negative attitude toward Washington. Rubin advised Erdogan to ask Secretary Rice why US promises with regard to the PKK have

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not been kept. 'A majority of the Iraqis see the insurgents as terrorists,' said Rubin, and he called on Turkish officials not to regard attacks by insurgents in Iraq there as 'legitimate.' Rubin also noted that he fully supported Turkey's policy on Cyprus, and voiced hope that Ankara will get 'guarantees' from Washington on this issue. Rubin claimed that the attitude of the AK Party and anti-Jewish sentiments in the Turkish press have weakened the support of the Jewish lobby for Turkey. 'Maybe Ankara can depend on Paris, Berlin, and Brussels from now on -- after all, aren't they Turkey's new friends?' Rubin asked.

Sezer Participates in Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Inauguration Ceremony: Turkish President Sezer joined leaders from Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Kazakhstan in the Azerbaijani capital Baku yesterday for the opening of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline, papers report. Sezer said at the inauguration ceremony that BTC would assure the security of energy distribution and reduce the burden on the Turkish Straits. He noted that Turkey aimed to become a reliable energy corridor, and outlined plans for turning the Ceyhan Terminal into a trade and export center for energy. Sezer added that the pipeline will become more profitable when Kazakhstan joins the project. President Sezer also expressed hope that the Shah Deniz natural gas pipeline project from Baku to Erzurum via Tbilisi would be activated by the end of 2006. Sezer said that the Turkey-Greece-Italy natural gas pipeline continued to transport Caspian basin resources to European markets. 'Together with Russia, Norway and Algeria, Turkey is one of the four main routes for transportation of natural gas to the European Union. Turkey also seeks to transport these natural gas resources to the United States via a liquefied natural gas terminal it plans to build at Ceyhan Terminal.' Sezer emphasized that another important project was the construction of a railway between Kars-Tbilisi-Baku. Aliyev, Saakashvili and Sezer signed a joint declaration on the Kars-Akhalkalaki-Tbilisi-Baku international railway transport corridor, a project with an estimated cost of 450 million USD. "Yeni Safak" quotes US Energy Secretary Samuel Bodman as saying that the BTC inauguration marked 'a day that will change the world.' Meanwhile, the United States on Wednesday hailed the opening of the four billion USD BTC pipeline as an 'historic project' that will also strengthen the independence of Azerbaijan and Georgia. Secretary Bodman read a letter from President Bush at the opening ceremony, in which the American President hailed the project as a 'monumental achievement.'

Reactions to Cancellation of Controversial Armenian Conference: Several Turkish academics sharply criticized Justice Minister Cemil Cicek's harsh statements that forced the cancellation of a conference that was to be held at Bosphorus University (BU) to discuss claims regarding the mass killings of Armenians at the hand of Ottoman forces in 1915-17. Following the strong criticism by Cicek, who described the conference as a 'stab in the back of the Turkish people,' the university decided to postpone the conference. Professor Murat Belge pointed to the contradiction between Turkey's official position inviting relevant parties to examine the Turkish archives, and the Cicek remarks that led to the cancellation of the conference. Belge speculated in "Radikal" that Cicek had probably called the university and pressed for the cancellation. He added that the Istanbul governor had said he could not guarantee the security of the conference participants, and that a prosecutor had demanded to see all papers to be read at the conference. 'Cicek's remarks amount to a lynching, just like the one we recently witnessed in Trabzon. The Justice Minister's provocation means that efforts for democratization in Turkey have been officially called off until further notice,' Belge noted. Hrant Dink, editor of the Armenian weekly "Agos" and a conference participant, said Cicek's remarks strengthened the hand of those who say Turkey is not democratic enough to discuss the Armenian issue. 'It also shows there is a difference between what the government says and its real intentions,' Dink noted. 'Cicek's remarks are unbelievable,' said an unidentified EU diplomat: 'It not only kills the government's policy on the Armenian issue, but also the support for Turkey's EU drive,' the diplomat said. Cem Ozdemir, a Turkish-German Green lawmaker in the European Parliament said that Turkey had missed an opportunity to show the world a transparent and tolerant face: 'Turkey has shot itself in the foot,' Ozdemir said, speculating that Ankara had fallen into the trap of anti-EU circles in the country.

Teachers' Union Banned for Demanding Education in Mother Tongues: The Court of Cassation (Yargitay) voted unanimously to overturn a lower court decision to close the teachers' union Egitim-Sen for arguing the case for providing education in languages other than Turkish. An Ankara court had earlier ruled that, under the European

Convention on Human Rights, the union could not be closed. Following the Yargitay decision yesterday, the case will now be sent back to the local court. The decision of the Yargitay is binding, so the local court is expected to decide for closure of the union.

'Torture' Seminar Cancelled: "Aksam" reports that an EU-sponsored seminar on torture to be held in Istanbul Wednesday with the participation of doctors, members of the judiciary, and international organizations was cancelled by the Turkish Ministry of Justice over fears that the gathering may have resulted in 'anti-Turkish propaganda' claiming that torture is prevalent in the country. Medical Foundation Director Sherman Carroll urged the Justice Ministry to provide an explanation for the decision.

Talabani to Visit Turkey: Iraq's President Jalal Talabani plans to visit Turkey in June as the official guest of Turkish President Sezer, "Cumhuriyet" reports. Talabani will be given a top-level state reception, including a call on Sezer at the Presidential Palace in Ankara. Turkish Foreign Ministry (MFA) sources see the visit as the beginning of a new period between Iraq and Turkey, and expect to discuss with Talabani the status of Kirkuk, the removal of the PKK presence in northern Iraq, and the process of writing Iraq's constitution.

Church in US Joins Koran Abuse: The Danieltown Baptist church in Rutherford, North Carolina put up a neon sign on its front lawn that reads 'The Koran needs to be flushed,' Turkish dailies report. The story, including a photo, was featured on the front page of the Islamist-oriented "Yeni Safak." Pastor Creighton Lovelace reportedly refused to take the sign down, saying that it reflected the 'word of God.' The church's attitude drew the fury of Muslims living in the region, the paper noted, recalling growing protest demonstrations around the world over alleged abuse of the Holy Koran in Guantanamo Bay prison.

Ankara: No Policy Change in Status of Istanbul Patriarchate: Turkish Foreign Ministry (MFA) Spokesman Namik Tan said on Wednesday that the Orthodox Synod meeting in Istanbul concerning alleged fraud by Jerusalem Patriarch Irineos I should not be regarded as a change in Turkey's position on the 'ecumenical' status of the Patriarchate. 'Turkey cannot be a party to internal matters of the Orthodox world, so the meeting held in Istanbul yesterday cannot have any impact on Turkey,' Tan said. Tan noted that the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Istanbul continued spiritual service to 'Turkey's Greek Orthodox nationals' without any interference or discrimination.

EDITORIAL OPINION: Russia; The EU; Caspian Energy

"Russian Bases in Georgia"
Fikret Ertan wrote in the Islamist-intellectual "Zaman" (5/26): "The fate of the two Russian bases in Georgia is still a matter of contention between the two sides. This debate has continued for years, but the two sides have failed to come up with a clear solution. But there are some new developments in this regard. First, Russia and Georgia have restarted the negotiation process in Tbilisi. It seems that the Russian military staff and heavy weapons deployed on those bases will likely be transferred to Armenia. . This second development is a cause for worry, particularly in Azerbaijan. The Baku administration has gone as far as to deliver a diplomatic note to Moscow on this issue. As for Russia, it has about 19 military bases and installations of various sizes. When the Russian military personnel move from Georgia to Armenia, the Russian military presence in that country will be stronger than ever before."

"The Privileged Partnership Trap"
Zafer Atay wrote in the economic-political "Dunya" (5/26): "Privileged partnership has emerged as a new formula for Turkey-EU relations invented by Germany and France. Both countries came up with this idea in order to keep Turkey from being a full member of the EU. French President Chirac, his party rival Sarkozy, and Germany's CDU leader Angela Merkel believe that a privileged partnership for Turkey is the magic formula that will resolve the problems between EU and Turkey as part of the membership negotiations. They are acting based on prejudice, as they all consider Turkey to be non-European. . The privileged partnership idea is an obvious trap for Turkey. We must be very careful not to fall into it."

"Turkey to Become Energy Transit Center"
Hakan Celik commented in the mass appeal-sensational "Posta" (5/26): "After reports about deteriorating relations with the US, unresolved relations with the EU, and chaos in Iraq, at last we have some positive developments. Moreover, this development has been achieved despite many countries' efforts to derail it by lobbying against Turkey. The first flow of oil started on its way through the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC)

pipeline yesterday. Turkey has been dreaming about this 'project of the century' for years. Azeri and Kazakh oil will be transferred to world markets through the BTC pipeline. This pipeline will open the way for Turkey to become one of the most important energy transit points in the world. The BTC project will benefit Turkey not only strategically, but economically as well."

EDELMAN